

Staffordshire Highways Roadmap to a Better Network

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Background

For decades now the highways networks across the country have been subject to challenging funding environments leading to a decline in the condition of our assets. Staffordshire is no exception. Staffordshire County Council Highways assets have, as a result, deteriorated year on year. The last administration invested significant amounts of local taxpayers' money on road repairs and resurfacing between 2009/10 and 2024/25 in addition to central government grants and other funding sources, yet the deterioration of our highway assets has continued unabated.

This slide of our assets into a degraded and compromised condition is evident for us all to see. In some cases, this has led to a failure to be able to maintain assets in an acceptable functional state leading to restrictions and closures. Chetwynd Bridge and Branston Bridge recently are prime examples of the effects the degrading condition of assets can have on the functional integrity of our highways network.

This situation affects all asset types across the highway's portfolio which are all subject to deteriorating conditions and maintenance backlog. We need to change this, but it is not going to be an easy task given the decades of decline that need to be reversed and the scale and nature of our assets:

- We maintain nearly 4,000 miles of highway – that's 55 times as long as Hadrian's Wall or the same distance as Stafford to Chicago, Illinois!
- Added to this, we have nearly 3,000 miles of footway

- Our structures, including bridges, retaining walls and underpasses and 6 reservoirs number 3,600
- We also oversee the care of 115,000 streetlights
- All Road Traffic Controlled (RTC) signalised junctions
- 200kms of cycleways
- More than 150,000 road gullies
- 475,000 trees
- 2.2 million square metres of urban grass and 5,800km of rural grass verges
- Over 400 milestones and other historic monuments
- 16 surface water pumping stations
- Road markings, non-illuminated traffic signs, road studs, pedestrian barriers, vehicle restraint systems, cycle stands, bollards, hedges, embankments, grit bins, catchpits, lagoons, trash screens, kerbs, laybys, ditches, weather stations and much more
- Our total highways asset value is more than £7 billion

Following the outcome of local elections in May 2025, it has been our stated intention to focus on Highways as one of our key areas. The new administration has worked with officers

in the first few weeks to understand the current position and to develop a direction of travel for the future. This roadmap summarises the outcome.

We estimate the total cost to repair all the roads and bridges that need it in Staffordshire to be around £1.2 billion. To put this into context, under current funding levels, it will take 181 years to repair all the assets in our county.

If we look at structures on

their own, the picture is even bleaker. The total cost to bring our structures into a good state of repair is estimated to be £618 million. Under current funding levels, it would take 515 years to complete this work.

The scale of the challenge we have been presented with cannot be overstated, but change is desperately needed and that change needs to start now. Taking the necessary action to address the situation has been delayed for far too long already, and we are determined to move forward in a way that shifts the position from barely keeping up to making tangible improvements.



Without a change this slide will almost certainly continue and accelerate as critical assets become even more condition sensitive in the future. Currently, the rate of repairs can barely keep pace with the annual requirements let alone start to address the backlog of repairs.

It is time for action. This highway's roadmap sets out the high-level strategies and actions being taken to change the environment so we 'stop the slide and turn the tide.'

Roadmap

To aid the development of this Roadmap we have, in our initial weeks, started and continue with a strategic review across the entire highways business including, legislation, strategic approach, methods of delivery and budgets.

The funding challenges will not change quickly, but there are things we can do to create a different environment and approach. Through finding efficiency savings, changing how we plan and execute our own works, seeking better working arrangements with 3rd parties and changes to the regulatory environment we can work to shift the Business as Usual (BaU) model further towards a proactive approach to repairs in the future, and embed this as the new BaU model.



To achieve this, we have set out 3 key high-level outcomes we want to deliver that define the agenda and underpin all decisions going forward:

- Fix our Roads
- Save our Structures
- Address our backlog

All strategies, changes and projects will be assessed against and designed to support these outcomes.

Fix our Roads

There are a significant number of our own highway led works everyday across the network, but we are in the minority when it comes to works being undertaken. Around 60% of all

works on our network are delivered by utilities and other 3rd parties such as developers. These total around 40,000 work permits per year across the county.

The current approach to repairs can result in multiple visits (both planned and reactive) creating duplication of works, extended work site durations, increased costs and poor customer satisfaction. This approach has developed over many years and has been influenced, by amongst other things, inadequate funding, current legislation, and local environmental rules on working hours. There has been a lack of coordination of planning between our own works across different asset types or with utilities and 3rd party works have not been robust, leading to newly repaired roads being dug up again by others.

By addressing these issues, we can create a window of opportunity to do more work and generate overall savings that can be directed at reducing the backlog.

All repairs result in disruption to the network but for several years the level of disruption through multiple works in conflicting localities has resulted in the network barely maintaining a functional capacity. Residents have been very clear for some time as to what they expect, and it isn't more of the same. We have listened and are making changes to bring back a balance between works and network functionality.



Managing the disruption across the network that inevitably results from highway repairs is a critical issue and one we are addressing. We cannot just keep pushing ever more works into areas that cause saturation and a breakdown in the functionality of the highways network. This damages businesses and creates unsustainable issues for residents going about their daily lives.

We need to fix more roads if we are to deliver the necessary change but also ensure we still maintain a balance of works versus disruption across the network. We need to work smarter, be innovative, create opportunities to do more by maximising hours, reducing overall durations, and ensuring when we have possession of the network we do as much work as possible across the assets in that location. This reduces the need for future visits, further disruption and associated costs of separate work plans.

Save our Infrastructure

While the roads get all the attention and the effects of the degradation are clear to be seen, the effect on our structures from the years of degradation is even more significant. Both Chetwynd and Branston bridges are prime examples of this effect. There are other critical structures across the network that haven't yet reached the critical point of these two bridges but that are clearly showing signs of degradation and do present a real risk that they may also, in the future, become functionally unsustainable leading to restrictions and disruption.

We need to ensure we manage and mitigate the current risks as much as possible and seek the necessary support to address such risks before they become issues. This we will do through:

- Identifying and quantifying assets which require repairs to bring back to an adequate standard,
- Notifying and working with affected communities to ensure, if the worst happens, it is not an overnight surprise, and contingencies are ready to mitigate the effects as much as possible.
- Developing risk management, contingency and network management plans that can be mobilised to support communities and reduce consequences if issues occur.

The cost associated with repairing or replacing structures is significant and of a magnitude that cannot easily be provided for within the existing local funding arrangements. For example, Chetwynd Bridge and Branston Bridge will cost around £30M each to replace. A concentrated effort to secure the additional funds from central government is needed.

Address our backlog

The backlog has been years in the making and will not be fixed overnight. We do however need to change our approach if any progress is to be made in addressing this longstanding issue. Currently we are barely keeping pace on an annual basis, and with the continuing degradation across the asset base, this will ultimately lead to worse outcomes if not halted.

The scale of the back log cannot be overstated. Around 30,000 safety defects remain on rolling schedule of works identified but not funded or planned for repair.

Carrying this bow wave of backlog year on year restricts our ability to halt the slide. Therefore, addressing the backlog is critical to turning the tide. This ultimately needs additional funding but we also need to find new and innovative ways of doing 'business' differently that target not just today's problem but makes meaningful improvements to the rolling backlog.

New thinking, new approaches and challenging the current norms are required to drive down these numbers and the programmes and projects being developed are designed to drive this change and to bring this deferred maintenance and repair back into delivery plans.



Programmes & Projects

The 3 key outcomes have led to the development of 4 key programme streams and supporting projects. These taken collectively frame the changes we are seeking to implement in shifting the BaU model.

These break down into:

- Strategic: changes to the way we plan, co-ordinate and communicate operations creating a new BaU approach.
- Tactical and Innovation: How we execute works, new technologies and products etc. (finding better methods, more enduring results, local delivery priorities etc.).
- Budgetary Changes and Efficiencies: Finding the funds to make the necessary improvements (improve the £s in the ground versus management costs balance) and seek priority of additional funds from other local savings.
- Campaign for Staffordshire: Actions outside our own direct control requiring support from others (external actions e.g. legislative changes that constrain our operational practices and strengthen our ability to manage 3rd parties, improved multi-year budget settlements and capital investment in our structures).

These programmes, while deliverable as standalone, complement and support each other. Each plays a part in achieving this roadmap to better highways. The projects driven by the programmes will form the focus of the actions taken going forward.

Strategic: 4 project phases

The strategic plan has 4 phases of action each building on the previous. These create our revised BaU model for the future:

- **Communications:** Continue to improve the communications from the Highways business to residents and businesses. Provide better information as to why and how and not just what is happening. Regular updates during prolonged timescale (10 days+) works as to progress and when issues or problems occur and what the effect will be.
- Transition to a **geographic approach for road repairs** (fix a whole road /section of road): A shift in approach away from priority/chronological to area led repairs for planned works. Targeting all road defect repairs. Coordinated into single encompassing work plans reducing revisits, cost of traffic management, disruption, and creating windows of opportunity for additional works.
- **Whole Asset Model** SCC assets: combining asset works into SCC managed asset plans. These encompass multiple asset types and funding streams into single plans of work. This needs us to refine budget allocations and coordinate drawdown to address works across areas. Combine road and footway repairs, gully repairs etc. in to 'one hit' plans. We visit, repair and move to the next.
- **Whole Asset inc. 3rd party:** Extending strategy phase C to including 3rd parties e.g. utilities so we coordinate their forward plans with our plans of works. This will align, coordinate and sequence work so once fixed they stay fixed, and we do not then see the roads being dug up again (emergencies excepted) for planned 3rd party works.

Tactical and Innovation

The way we execute works needs to evolve to become more efficient. The current operating model focuses almost all of the delivery (approx. 90% of spend) through centralised control, away from the local community regardless of the scale and complexity, reactionary or planned and multiple asset types.

The Tactical & Innovative programme split into 4 key projects:

- **Functional specifications** will inform the most effective delivery approach and support a transition to a more mixed delivery model. This moves away from reliance on the status-quo and provides a transparent value-led approach for all types of work (e.g. more reactive or locally led works v major repairs or enhancement schemes) allowing direct sub-contractor or internal team delivery methods as shown to be most appropriate.
- **Create local reactive response teams.** Teams focused on priority and urgent repairs, so we reduce the current disruption levels to planned works by diverting them away

to reactive, also reducing costs through greater efficiencies, reducing replanning costs etc.

- **Innovative approaches:** using new technologies and products to support repairs, particularly reactive repairs to create an enduring first-time approach to these repairs that can then be fed in the planned preventative and reconstructive programmes of works. Reduces second, third visits etc. and costs of associated with repeated repairs.
- **Create locally focused area delivery teams** at depot level. Moving some smaller routine maintenance away from the central control into local area delivery. This allows local knowledge and priorities to influence work plans and create repairs that are most valued and beneficial to communities. The initial assets and activity types identified include:
 - I. Reactive repairs e.g. pothole using local management delivery approaches and knowledge to manage priority etc.
 - II. Gullies: This allows known problem gullies to receive enhanced maintenance based on a more risk focussed than pure cyclical approach.
 - III. Lining: Again, allows local knowledge and control of lining replacement or renewal to be targeted at the key areas and concerns.
 - IV. Grass and verges: coordination with Boroughs, Districts and Parish/Town councils and a local delivery focus.
 - V. Traffic Management: Local management and oversight of traffic management across our own highway worksites to ensure minimal timeline prior to and following works.

These changes deliver a shift away from central to local delivery, where local knowledge, control and management can add value. This provides opportunities to make budget savings, to create a local more responsive approach to repairs and allows greater opportunities for Staffordshire SME suppliers to access works locally to their areas directly with SCC rather than through the I+ contract arrangement.

Budgetary changes and Efficiencies

As already identified budgets for many years have been challenging and focused on the short-term, restricting long-term planning. This environment isn't going to change quickly so we need to find ways to work better and differently within the budget challenges and restrictions we have and to deliver maximum value from those budgets. The ongoing position with highways deterioration and backlog proves that doing the same things in the same way delivers the same results.

The gross annual budget across the highway portfolio is circa £145m pa. This covers the costs associated with running a business of this scale e.g. Overheads, staff costs, and also the actual work costs including materials, vehicles, plant & equipment etc.

As stated, the Efficiency Review of Highways has looked at the budgets and financial arrangements as part of the review. The focus being to identify changes, challenges and reductions in waste to maximise outcomes in terms of 'pounds in the ground'. All budget related efficiency projects are aimed at shifting the balance towards delivery and away from the management and enabling costs. These break down in to:

- A **10% efficiency challenge** that supports doing more within the existing budget constraints. Move the balance between value of work in the ground and overhead and management costs to a 75/25 minimum position.
- **Develop a fully costed backlog work bank** that identifies the value of the individual works required.
- **Identify and address ongoing annual budget shortfalls** taking account of the efficiency improvements being delivered.
- **Identify the magnitude of asset repairs** (catch up), the timescales involved etc. that allows these assets to be returned to an adequate, maintainable state without special measures or plans being required.

These projects allow the full quantum of funding shortfalls, both annual and capital repairs (catch up) to be demonstrated and supports the campaign programme. They also demonstrate for our campaign purposes that the county council has not just sought extra monies but is also making best use of existing resources available, thus minimising additional funding levels being sought and showing Staffordshire to be place providing demonstrable good returns on investment when compared to others. This should strengthen our case for the additional funding.

Campaign for Staffordshire

While the other 3 programmes focus on what we can do to make a difference in-house to deliver improvements, this programme of projects focuses on the external support needed in the delivery of the road map.

There is a history of just accepting whatever we get from central government, and it is a fact they have the powers. But Staffordshire deserves to be heard and deserves to have needs and expectations at least publicly campaigned for. Silence will not change anything. The campaign to **Keep Staffordshire Moving** does exactly what it says on the tin.



- Legislative changes to aid control and management of works across all parties (utilities, developers, etc.). These will support the better management and planning of works across the network reducing late changes, disruption and poor sequencing of activities. These changes help drive a revised culture/relationship that embeds the cooperative and coordinated approach set out previously. Rather than just through voluntary cooperation these changes will create a framework and processes where it is in all parties' interests to work collaboratively to achieve common outcomes.
- Reduce/ eliminate the residual budget shortfalls to ongoing steady state budget outcomes. Seek additional funding through demonstrating the need and showing our efficiency of delivery. Seek fair multi-year settlements that allow further efficiencies through long-term planning to be realised.
- Capital investment funding to allow repair/replacement addressing the historical asset problems and removing the risks arising from further deterioration.

As part of these campaigns, we will also seek to engage with other likeminded councils to bring a greater voice to the action as well as seeking the commitment and support of all Staffordshire MPs to lobby on Staffordshire's behalf.

This approach to take proactive campaigns for better settlements and support for Staffordshire to central government hasn't been a strategy of previous administrations. Accordingly, it is a new area where we need to develop skills quickly and apply experience and guidance to allow SCC to navigate the national political corridors of power more successfully. We will need to seek out and engage with appropriate and experienced advisors who can aid and guide our campaigns to maximise political opportunities and outcomes for Staffordshire.

Conclusion

The detail set out shows the breadth and depth of challenges and the changes we are making to bring the necessary improvements to the highways network. Moving from a



reactive to a proactive business model and by demonstrating well managed and efficient delivery strengthens our case for additional investment.

Each element is deliverable in isolation and each step we take will deliver improvements and bring value. But the sum of the collective is greater than the individual parts and is how we maximise the returns on investment for Staffordshire.

The entire outcome of this is to:

- **Maximise value** for taxpayer money,
- **Repair and improve the network** through restoring the condition of our highway assets,
- **Create a sustainable and maintainable position** where year on year the direction is forward through improvements, not firefighting to stop further decline,
- **Secure sustainable and enduring funding streams** driving further efficiency improvements.

We committed from the outset to make a difference, to maximise value for taxpayer's money, and to bring a business approach to everything we do. This Roadmap demonstrates how we will set about delivering on these commitments.

It is how we go about making Staffordshire highways better, Keep Staffordshire Moving, and it is how we **stop the slide and turn the tide.**